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ABSTRACT

Taking advantage of the opportunity to heighten cultural awareness and create an intercultural exchange, this paper presents two articles that provide a summary of the rationale, methodology, and assignments used to teach the linked courses of an introductory speech communication course and an English-as-a-Second-Language Oral Skills course. The first paper discusses the rationale for the introductory speech communication course, course linkage rationale, procedures for pairing students in the courses, a group project, audience analysis and adaptation, and reactions of the students. The first paper concludes that the exposure afforded by the linkage allows students to discover and begin to understand not only cultural differences, but also cultural similarities. The second paper discusses procedures for pairing students, a reception for students, interviews, audience concept, and student reactions. The second paper concludes that the linkage with native speakers of English promotes communicative competence through meaningful discourse. (Contains 13 references.) (RS)

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CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION THROUGH COURSE LINKAGE: UTILIZING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN SPEECH 110 (Introduction to Speech/Communication) & ESL 009 (Oral Skills)

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CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION THROUGH COURSE LINKAGE: UTILIZING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN SPC 110 (Introduction to Speech Communication) and ESL 009 (Oral Skills)

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Marshall McLuhan coined the term *global village* more than thirty years ago to describe the consequences of mass media's ability to 'shrink' the world. The emergence of additional technologies (e-mail, faxes, etc.) has created the possibility for virtually instantaneous communication around the corner or around the world. Concern about U.S. population changes and the influence of technology and global economics is reflected in an increased interest in inter-cultural/multi-cultural education. Culture influences all aspects of human communication. In the introductory Speech/Communication course, the ability to explore cultural differences and the impact of culture on interpersonal, small group and public communication is important in preparing students as competent communicators. The opportunity to heighten cultural awareness and create an inter-cultural exchange by linking one section of SPC 110 with the new ESL oral skills course provided a unique option for teaching and learning.

Originally designed to develop listening comprehension and pronunciation skills for English as a Second Language students with low intermediate English proficiency, it became apparent after the first semester ESL 009 was offered (Spring 1996) that more emphasis was needed on the sociocultural aspects of language in order to develop more complete communicative effectiveness. Thus, the idea of linking ESL students with American counterparts in a more formal way was developed and proposed.

Toward these outcomes, beginning in Fall 1996, we have linked the Oral Skills course with *one section* of the Introduction to Speech/Communication course. Students in each class are partnered for the semester. This collaboration is twofold: It provides native speakers of English the opportunity to apply in practice the theoretical concepts from the course while gaining personal experience in communicating with someone from a culture different from their own. Likewise it serves the ESL students' linguistic and cultural needs by closing the social distance and exposing them to American culture firsthand.

The following two articles provide a summary of the rationale, methodology and assignments used in each of these linked courses.

CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION THROUGH COURSE LINKAGE:
SPC 110 - Introduction to Speech Communication and ESL 009 - Oral Skills

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Course Rationale

SPC 110 is a human performance course designed to help students understand and improve oral communication in all its manifestations. Learning can be organized into three major categories: cognitive, affective and psychomotor/behavioral. These domains are widely accepted in the educational literature. The introductory course includes topics such as listening, critical thinking, perception and self, language and nonverbal communication and aims to teach students to apply these cognitive and behavioral skills to a variety of communication contexts relevant to their personal and professional lives. Through required assignments in small group discussion and problem-solving, a long-term group project, journal assignments — usually focused on interpersonal or group communication — and two oral presentations (informative and persuasive) emphasis is placed on the application of basic communication theory to practical communication experiences in interpersonal, small group, and public settings.

Course Linkage Rationale

Teaching with an emphasis on cultural awareness is exciting, but can also be problematic. When dealing with issues of cultural diversity there is always the potential for uneasiness among students. This is layered on top of any communication apprehension the students may already experience. Some students — my experience has been most students — are eager to learn about other cultures, yet unsure about how to proceed. They are concerned that they may reveal their own ignorance of, unfamiliarity with, or even unconscious intolerance of other cultures. One American young woman was horrified (and then embarrassed by her expression of disapproval) upon learning that her Indian partner would have an arranged marriage.

The textbook, *Communicating Effectively*, selected for use in <u>all</u> sections of the SPC 110 course, has a strong commitment to "get students to see the world beyond their own community and even beyond the nation." While readings, exercises and role-plays traditionally used in the course have great merit as instructional resources, the addition of students' personal experience — through real communication with real people — is a powerful and long-lasting learning and teaching tool.

METHODOLOGY

The challenge was to adapt an existing course to the linkage opportunity while still maintaining coherence and consistency among all sections of the course. The goal was for the students in the linked section of SPC 110 to have the same requirements and cover essentially the same assignments as students in other, non-linked, sections. Balance needed to be maintained so that the enrichment of the linkage did not create an overwhelming workload, nor overpower other important aspects of the course.

Communication Partners

Prior to linking or partnering the classes, the students in SPC 110 are introduced to the variables involved in communicating through an exploration of the basic model of communication. Exercises, videotapes and discussions of perspective, ethnocentrism and differences within "mainstream" American culture precede our first meeting with the ESL class. This takes up the first few weeks of the course and has the added advantage of allowing registration to stabilize. Based on student information sheets completed by students in both classes and faculty observations, students in each class are partnered for the semester. Diversity within American culture also needs to be addressed and special needs of students considered. For instance, one American student confided on her student form that she had a hearing impairment and needed to sit in the front of the class in order to lip read. In matching her with an ESL student, we took care to pair her with a student from a culture with eye contact norms similar to Euro-Americans.

There were additional considerations in adapting the course to incorporate the cross-cultural linkage. SPC 110 has a heavy research component requiring extensive library work outside of class time. During the first semester of linkage I partnered myself with an ESL student. I discovered through my experience as an ESL partner that what may appear to be a brief interview (consisting of 4 or 5 questions) could take an hour or more to accomplish due to cultural and linguistic constraints. Requiring so much time being interviewed would mean either lessening standards for other course requirements or shifting the emphasis of the whole course. Neither option was acceptable. Instead we were able to resolve the issue by requiring SPC 110 students to participate in only three (3) interviews initiated by their ESL student partner. These interviews are spaced throughout the semester and are coordinated between the two classes so as not to overlap with other major assignments. (ESL students are encouraged to engage in conversations with Americans other than their SPC 110 student partner for some assignments.) In addition, SPC 110 students conduct interviews as part of their research for a group project on inter-cultural communication. These conversations are held outside of class time and are scheduled at mutually convenient times. Additional contact between partners is at their discretion. Some partners have done the minimum required while others have met to go bowling, have lunch in the cafeteria, or other activities.

Group Project

As part of the unit on small group discussion and problem-solving, students in SPC 110 are divided into teams and given approximately four weeks to research a topic. Most sections have students research some aspect of interpersonal communication (i.e., self-disclosure, conflict resolution); for the linkage section, the groups must select from a list of 8 - 10 topics relating to inter-cultural and interpersonal communication. This list includes:

- Greeting and farewell behaviors
- Differences in the use of space and distance among cultures
- Approaches to conflict: differences between American and other cultures
- Friendship, dating and marriage rituals and customs
- Time difference across cultures: calendars, punctuality, duration and pace

As part of the project, each group must devise their own set of interview questions. Each member of the team must individually interview their ESL partner. The results of these interviews are discussed by the group and added to the other research resources discovered. The outcome is a group presentation reporting the results of the group's findings.

This assignment permits students an opportunity to apply the concepts and skills of group discussion and cooperation taught and practiced in class. The project further allows students to learn from each other about the research process. It also allows groups to demonstrate knowledge of the importance and proper use of supporting materials in planning and preparing a presentation. The linkage section requirement of interviewing adds the benefit of reinforcing the concept that there are a variety of possible resources available for research. Another advantage to the linked section is in the area of Audience Analysis.

Audience Analysis & Adaptation

Competent communicators are audience-centered, not speaker-centered. The fact that a person understands what it is that they are trying to convey matters little if their audience (whether one or one hundred) does not understand their message. The natural tendency in interpersonal conversation is to adapt one's message to one's listener. Most people, for instance, use less complex, more redundant messages when talking to young children than when speaking to other adults. This practice is equally important to successful communication in groups and in oral presentations.

Prior to the group project, SPC 110 students have presented informative speeches to their classmates. In this initial speaking assignment they needed to adapt their topic and speech to meet the needs and interests of their classmate audience. This involves consideration of individual beliefs and values as well as demographics (age, gender, etc.). For example, an audience composed primarily of 18 - 20-year-olds would not likely find a speech on Social Security and retirement inherently interesting. Any speaker choosing

such a topic for such an audience would need to carefully build listener interest and involvement before information would be received and retained. Student speakers must consider their purpose or goal in speaking and its relation to their audience.

The group presentation allows this concept to be not only reinforced but further extended. The outcome of the group research project is a presentation reporting on the results of their research, given to the rest of the SPC 110 class *and the ESL 009* class. Groups must keep in mind the mixed nature of their audience (composed of both native speakers of English and non-native speakers) in selecting and narrowing their topic, organizing their material and planning their presentation. The importance of adaptation was demonstrated by one group who, in discussing different marriage customs, arranged their material by religion without realizing that half of their audience had no idea who or what the Amish are.

The SPC 110 students also serve as audience members for one set of individual oral presentations by the students in the ESL class. In this way they can appreciate the perspective of both the speaker and the audience.

REACTIONS

During the semester students are required to keep a journal, reflecting on their interaction with their ESL partner as a study in communication. Journal entries allow students to display their frustrations and triumphs: "[During our first meeting] I felt that I was expressing/answering her questions clearly, but the more that was said, the more she shook her head & answered with something that completely made no sense. I feel like its my fault. Is it, I wonder? . . . Is she just as nervous as I am?" The entry after this pair's second meeting reported on their considerable progress and concluded that "I think I would say, if asked, that I actually had a good time." Another student discussed the results of an interview conducted by his partner, by stating, "again, I found myself learning more about my own culture as well as hers. . . .Overall, I feel this meeting was beneficial for both of us." Journals are collected and reviewed by the SPC 110 professor before submission for final grading. In this way problems with particular pairs are revealed and faculty intervention or clarification can be provided, when needed.

When asked on end-of-semester evaluations to "list three concepts, activities, skills or assignments from the course that will be of most use to you in your career or personal life," more than half the students indicated some aspect of the experience of being linked with their ESL partner. Although <u>all</u> sections focus on issues of diversity, students in other, non-linked, sections, when asked the same question, did not mention diversity activities or concepts as often.

SPC 110 students in the linked section were also asked to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the linkage. Many indicated that while the experience was difficult, it was definitely worthwhile. Several students mentioned a heightened appreciation and understanding of their own culture as an unexpected bonus, while others

mentioned their increased patience and comfort in inter-cultural situations. The one weakness mentioned consistently was the difficulty in scheduling time to meet with their partners. This was especially so during the Fall 1996 semester when the linked sections did not meet at the same time. Changing the sections to meet at the same time improved but did not eliminate the problem. With a more than 20 students in a section of SPC 110, it is difficult to provide additional class time for meeting with partners and still have enough time in class to hear individual and group oral presentations.

CONCLUSION

The opportunity to increase understanding and insight provided by this linkage is valuable to both the students in SPC 110 and the non-native speakers in the ESL class. Through the interpersonal and public speaking contexts the effectiveness of audience centered communication – audience adaptation, listening skills, awareness of word choice, and nonverbal elements – are reinforced in meaningful ways for SPC 110 students. ESL students further develop their conversation and listening skills while gaining further experience with American culture. The exposure afforded by the linkage allows students to discover and begin to understand not only cultural differences, but also cultural similarities. Developing strategies to adapt communication for diverse audiences benefits everyone.

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CROSS - CULTURAL COMMUNICATION THROUGH COURSE LINKAGE:
ESL 009 - Oral Skills and SPC 110 - Introduction to Speech Communication

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To become more expert in the college classroom and in social situations, an effective way for non-native speakers (**NNS**) of English to begin to learn about North American culture is to engage in cross-cultural exchanges with native speakers of English.

There are distinctive classroom cultures as well as the larger social and historical context of non-native speakers' attempts to acquire English, what many anthropologists call "deep culture": knowing the language and knowing how to use the language. Anthropologists view culture as the pattern of beliefs, behaviors, and values maintained by a group of people. The conversational partners is an attempt to develop a more complete communicative competence.

METHODOLOGY

Conversation Partners

Early in the semester, students give us basic demographic information and student profiles to help us to partner them for conversation. Ideally, the partners meet every week to practice conversation. This meaningful discourse goes beyond classroom role play and pairwork, which can produce stilted language; however, authentic conversation generates meaningful discourse.

We based our match on students' interests, native languages, schedules and residences to enhance their relationships. This collaboration was not only to practice conversation informally; it was also to complete written classroom assignments.

Reception

After the partners are matched, it is time to meet. A reception is held during the second week of classes. To prepare, the ESL students practice American introductions, ice-breakers, small talk, appropriate topics for strangers and closings. Food and

beverages are served. When the ESL students find their conversation partners by identifying the name tags, they practice the following speech acts:

For example:

Introduction phrases -	Informal	Formal
	Hi, I'm Kim.	*Hello. My name is Kim.*
Ending a conversation -	*Well, talk to you later.*	
	Keep in touch.	
	Hope to see you again soon.	
Small talk -	*Where do you live?*	
	What do you do for a living?	

At this time, students are expected to schedule their next meetings.

Interviews

An assignment for oral, aural and written work is for the students to interview American partners based on interviews from one of the classroom texts, Face to Face. The students negotiate a time to meet. They interview their partners about various aspects of American culture such as body language, male and female communication or education in the U.S. These topics are selected by the students. These interviews are later shared in class and submitted for a grade.

For example:

If you go to a job interview, what is the correct body language to use when you are introduced to the boss? What should you say?

Passports to English

One major assignment is the completion of passports. The ESL students are given passports worth 30% of the final grade. The conversation partner component is worth 10%. The American partners are asked to sign the passports each time they meet to practice conversation or to complete a class assignment. Also included in this passport are teacher conferences, AV library work and their English usage outside the classroom. At the teacher conferences, they are given stamps for assignments completed.

Audience concept

The ESL students act as an audience for the students in SPC 110, who give a group presentation. As part of the research for this presentation, the ESL students are interviewed about a selected cultural topic. By contributing to the topic, the ESL students play an active role and enhance their listening and comprehension skills, making

it easier for them to understand a "real" classroom presentation. Moreover, the 009 class has been practicing note-taking skills and are expected to choose one presentation from which to take notes. This experience, by promoting a meaningful audience and eliciting active listening, prepares them to mainstream into a typical college classroom.

Similarly, the SPC 110 students act as an audience for the formal speeches of the ESL students: ESL 009 Presentation - BE THE PROFESSOR.
The students spend approximately 5 minutes as the professor on a topic of their choice, perhaps from their jobs or majors. They may give a lecture or a demonstration. While giving their speeches, the students are videotaped. At a later class, the professor and ESL students review the tape for:

- body language - use of voice and effectiveness of presentation
- pronunciation of individual sounds, stress and intonation
- grammar and language use
- organization.

Collaboration of the ESL students and the SPC 110 students promotes a meaningful audience and elicits active listening. As one class gives an oral presentation, the other class acts as the audience.

REACTIONS

Based on the professor's (Theresa Savard) observation of students in the classroom and on students' written course evaluations, they responded positively to this linkage. In anticipation of the reception the students were apprehensive, yet during the reception they engaged their American partners with enthusiasm, forgetting their earlier unease.

The first written interview with their partners proved to be laborious and, for some, frustrating because of the complex topic of body language. Later in the semester, the interviews were more fluid and convivial. After each interview, the class discussions were quite lively. Each student had learned new vocabulary (some interesting phrasing) and a new aspect of American culture. In addition, the majority were able to warm up to their partners so much that some met on social occasions, e.g., bowling. Ms. Savard believes for next semester she will give the students a less detailed first interview to decrease frustration.

In the end-of-semester evaluations, students commented on the strengths of the native speaker interaction as well as some weaknesses. Students' most common response was that they liked the opportunity to interact with Americans, who serve as a bridge to their communities where only native languages are spoken. Otherwise they receive very little exposure. One student wrote: "Yes, thanks a lot to you. My partner helped me from the beginning of school. He helped me two or three times a week - social and conversation." Another stated, "I think that I had good luck with my partner because out

of classes we always had conversation or by telephones." Yet another student noted, "I met him almost everyday, but some of the partners were not co-operating with others." The weakness in these interactions was that some students had difficulty arranging a time to meet because many of them work and have family responsibilities. Next semester, to help resolve this issue, the students will be given class time to complete their first assignment.

Finally, we would like to design the class to include more or less an even number of ESL and American students, although SPC 110 has a larger maximum enrollment (22) than ESL 009 (15).

CONCLUSION

This linkage with native speakers of English promotes communicative competence through meaningful discourse, a variety of speech acts, cross-cultural exchange and active audience participation. Moreover, this collaborative effort can close the social distance the NNS often feels on the college campus and inflates student pride. All students can celebrate their cultural identities and expand their perspectives while developing concrete skills.

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